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Gary Fears

President, Pizza Hut THDMA Coop.

Problem

Nineteen Wabash Valley Pizza Hut restaurants and their marketing group help to support the Pizza Hut Wabash Valley Classic, a four-day, 16-team boys' high school basketball tournament held in Terre Haute during the week between Christmas and New Year's. The Classic was started in 2000 to revive a renowned tournament that was based in Terre Haute from 1916 to 1972.

Gary Fears, president of the Pizza Hut THDMA Co-op, said one reason Pizza Hut became involved in supporting the Classic was that he had played in the old tournament. "That was when there was only one-class basketball in the state of Indiana and on a Friday night, everyone in the community went to support their high school team," Fears said. "Having a single-class tournament now (since the state had converted to four-class basketball based on school size) was something that the coaches and the athletic directors from the high schools wanted to do. From a profitability side, the 16 schools participate in the proceeds from the tournament, so they get a financial reward from that, and Pizza Hut is just glad to be a part of that." Local media support is crucial to the success of the tournament.

Solution

A committee was formed to put the tournament together, and having the host schools and the sponsor set, the committee needed a marketing firm to plan a public relations strategy for the tournament. "It was very easy to select MillerWhite, with their background and knowledge of the marketplace," Fears explained. "Sitting down with them, they put together press releases and signage for the tournament and for the luncheon and created a logo, which over the past seven years has really become a recognizable icon in the area."

The pairings draw luncheon brings together the coaches from all 16 schools for a media event. "We have about 140 guests and we do a live draw to choose the tournament match-ups for the first round," Fears said. "It's all just very well covered. The media plays a very important role in the success of our tournament. It's during a very busy time of year. There's a lot of advertising going on, and we have to make sure that all the newspaper, radio and television folks get out the dates of the tournament and the times of the games. So we need the media support and we certainly get that, as we're breaking attendance records every year."

Results

Fears said, "Pizza Hut receives a tremendous amount of exposure with the tournament during the four days of the event – all the television coverage, newspaper and radio, certainly give us far, far more exposures than you would normally get with your standard advertising. The tournament improves each year, and certainly has the last two years with the championship and third place games being televised. The public relations and good will that Pizza Hut has received has been first class with this tournament. So MillerWhite's working relationship with the three major media outlets in Terre Haute certainly has played a major role in the Classic breaking attendance records every year."